

# MINUTES

**Quarterly Meeting of the  
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION  
Held, pursuant to notice  
Monday, September 20, 2004 — 9:00 AM  
State Veterans Cemetery-Bloomfield  
17357 Stars & Stripe Way  
Bloomfield, MO**

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

- A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Roll Call

In attendance: **Chairman Emmett Fairfax; Vice Chairman Carson Ross; Member Bernadette Miller; Member Carl Niewoehner; Member General Arvid West**

- C. Introductions

Guests and staff present.

1. Guest: **Jim Whitfield**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **John Eckhoff**, St. Louis County Human Services; **Kathy Sturgeon**, St. Louis County Human Services; **Nancy Arnold**, Director VA Medical Center Poplar Bluff; **Jack Matthews**, President MVC Foundation, Inc.; **Harry Swinger**, DAV; **Bill Alexander**, American Legion; **Bill Matthews**, American Legion; **Elmer Wilson**, DAV; **Bonnie Gillespie**, American Legion; **David Shafer**, American Legion; **Joe Weber**, City of Dexter; **Winfield Richmond**, Bloomfield Assistance League; **Bill Aslin**, Mayor City of Bloomfield; **James Harnes**, Mayor City of Advance; **Gary Capps**, Stoddard Co. IDA; **Gary Deardorff**, Bloomfield Assistance League; **Jonathon Dawe**, The Daily Statesman; **Ray Coats**, County Commission; **Frank Sifford**, Stoddard Co. Commission; **Don White**, Stoddard Co.; **Kay Asbell**, Stoddard Co. Recorder; **Greg Mathis**, Stoddard Co. Commission; **Carla Moore**, Stoddard Co. Collector; **Jerry Elder**, Stoddard Co.

2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Deputy Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Anne Payne**, Superintendent of Homes; **Ken Swearengin**, Director Veterans Cemetery Bloomfield, **Stan Baughn**, Director Veterans Benefits Awareness Program;

- D. Approval of August 4, 2004 Commission Meeting Minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded.

## **II. OLD BUSINESS:**

### Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

Ron Taylor advised that per the request of the Commissioners at the June Commission meeting a Joint Interim Committee had been established by the legislature to evaluate the Commissions programs and budget issues. The first meeting was held in Jefferson City on September 9th and another in St. Louis on September 13th. The next interim meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 21 at KC Armory. These meetings give the Commission an opportunity to present a variety of veterans' issues not only budget but also the Trust Fund, additional assistance for the outreach programs we currently have been working, and support of the Military Relief Fund for families of the guard called to active duty. The Interim Committee will submit a report in October with proposed legislation and budget recommendations for the Legislature to work on this session.

At the August Commission meeting the Homes Program submitted a preliminary draft request for new funding needs.

1. Statewide pay increases – The Personnel Advisory Board made its recommendation for a statewide pay increases. MVC's budget increase went from 11million to 16million
2. Overtime pay – Bill passed and signed last session requiring overtime pay off at least once a fiscal year. This added an estimated cost of overtime for MVC.
3. Updated information on comparative salary on licensed nursing staff which also drove the estimate up.

Ron Taylor advised Julie Miller submitted the new budget to the Department this past week. In order to operate the existing program even without decision items it is going to require approximately a 16.4 million dollar fund switch from Home fund to GR to support the seven homes 1,350 beds. He reported the estimate given at the last Commission meeting regarding the Trust Fund will essentially be at zero by next June. Because of the overtime costs this year MVC is submitting a request for a 3million dollar supplemental budget to ensure we are adequately covered for this fiscal year.

The attached preliminary draft request for new funding proposal is based upon actual need. The need of the veterans who are applying in the Homes and the additional staff to allow us to accept veterans on a first come first serve bases no matter their level of care. Since this is different then how we have to currently do,

we will need to request additional funds. MVC will need the Commissioners approval in order to actively pursue with BAP and the Legislature.

Vice Chairman Ross made a motion to adopt the preliminary draft request for new funding. Commissioner Miller seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Niewoehner informed that MVC salaries are not competitive with the VA or the private sector. He stated if MVC doesn't have the qualified people (RN's, LPN's, CNA's) on staff we cannot accept residents. The VA cut the residents Per Diem almost \$2 per day along with a 12% increase in prescription drugs. In addition to these over the next six months since the federal government hasn't passed the budget they are still operating on the old budget which means MVC will be getting the lower per diem and the state will have to make up the difference. Commissioner Niewoehner also stated another problem MVC faces right now is shift differentials and over the past several years the state took money out of MVC construction/renovation fund and applying to GR to finance the Homes.

Chairman Fairfax stated that he spoke to legislators at the Joint Interim Committee hearings regarding our current situation with the Homes 1,350 beds, staffing issues and waiting lists. He explained that it is also important for veterans to talk to their Representatives and Senators to support veteran legislation.

Vice Chairman Ross added once this Interim Committee completes this report and their recommendations for legislation that will address these issues then the veterans need to talk to their state Representatives and Senators and encourage them to support this legislation.

Ron Taylor advised that the Missouri Veterans Commission will be hosting the legislative tour again this year. December 14<sup>th</sup>, St. Louis Veterans Home and December 15<sup>th</sup>, Bloomfield Veterans Cemetery.

Secretary of State Blunt toured the St. Louis Veterans Home on Saturday, September 18<sup>th</sup> and U.S. Senator Talent visited the Warrensburg Veterans Home.

#### Missouri Veterans Homes: Anne Payne, Superintendent of Homes

**Homes Program** – Anne Payne distributed a summary of the Homes Program July Activity which includes statistics, average daily census, waiting list, donations and volunteer hours. Also distributed was the Missouri Veterans Commission Quality Management Outcomes Report. This report is a comparison of the Missouri Veterans Homes with other Nursing Homes in the state and nation. The report shows that MVC is providing quality care in all areas of % of residents with pressure ulcers, physical restraints, urinary tract infection and unplanned weight loss.

Commissioner Miller complemented Anne Payne and her staff for providing good quality care.

Ron Taylor noted the VA completed the St. Louis Veterans Home survey and it was the second consecutive deficiency free survey received for the St. Louis Home.

Construction Update: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

**Construction Update** – Ron Taylor reported that the St. Louis Veterans Home entrance project will take about 6 weeks to complete.

The Warrensburg Veterans Home kitchen renovation project will be delayed till after the Holidays. This project should start in March 2005.

Commission Niewoehner stated that the construction report distributed at the August meeting the projections indicated will require all the 6 million dollars from the renovation/construction fund.

Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

**Service to Veterans** – Sharon Keith noted that the last meeting minutes it was incorrectly reported the total number of Supervisors/Service Officers/Assistance for the STV Program. The correct number is 36.

The Service Officers have been very busy. On the week-end of September 11th & 12<sup>th</sup> we had twelve MVC Service Officers involved in various outreach activities around the state that included the Clinton Supermarket, Southeast MO District Fair and the Freedom Salute Ceremonies at Arnold and St. Joseph.

Ms. Keith advised within the next few months MVC should be able to come up with some numbers of the increase in dollars as a result of the outreach efforts. This information will be available after the end of the Federal Government's fiscal year.

Ms. Keith informed the Commissioners the need for more Service Officers and has requested in the budget six additional for next year.

Commissioner Niewoehner asked Ms. Keith what is the processing time for a claim with VA. She reported the average time VA is taking in processing a claim is four to six months; however, this depends on the type of claim filed. The St. Louis Regional Office is approving as soon as they can. Any decrease in staff will extend the processing time. The appeals process is taking longer.

Ron Taylor announced the St. Louis Regional VA would like to host the next Commission meeting to be held in November. Commissioner West suggested it would be good time to get an update from the VA at that time.

#### Cemeteries Update: Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery

**Cemetery Program** – (Packet) Jess Rasmussen reported a combined total of 2,398 burials have been performed at the four cemeteries and 9,216 pre-registrations completed. Included in the packet is a county map with the numbers of pre-certifications/interments. This information shows areas we are and are not reaching statewide. Mr. Rasmussen also provided the Commission a needs assessment report for proposed Missouri State Veterans Cemetery at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Ken Swearingin, Director Bloomfield Cemetery informed the Commissioners he had been contacted regarding interment of CMSgt Therman Waller, MIA, missing 38 ½ years found recently in Vietnam. The service is scheduled for October 2 at 2:00 p.m. and is open to the public. A press release would go out to the AP from the Pentagon. There have been some special request (graveside service and fly over) made due to the circumstances. Mr. Swearingin will keep Mr. Rasmussen and Mr. Taylor updated on the situation.

Commissioner Ross commented to Mr. Rasmussen on the beautiful work that was completed on the committal shelter at Higginsville Cemetery. Windows and doors were installed to help block wind and weather.

Commissioner West recently visited the Higginsville Cemetery and also commented on its beauty and noted that MVC really takes care of the families.

**Super!!!**

Ron Taylor advised that a satisfaction survey was sent out in early August to more than 350 families from the four cemeteries asking for their services and facility to be rated in the category of excellent/good/fair/poor. We received 244 responses back and from them only two were rated poor and that was due to restrooms not open on weekends at the cemetery. Mr. Taylor stated the survey results were graded in five categories and the overall grade was 3.88 or 3.95.

#### VSO Grants: Ron Taylor, Executive Director

**VSO Grant Program-** Ron Taylor advised that there is one grant MVC has not finalized approval on yet due to still waiting on information and a decision will need to be made by November. Most of the organizations are experiencing the same level of increases (15% to 30% increase) as MVC Service Officers. He reported St. Louis Vashon High School Supermarket had a total of 22 Service Officers assisting with claims. These were from both the Commission and service

organizations. The state budgets \$750,000 each year for VSO Grants. Service Officers with the organizations would have to cut back if there were no grants available.

Veterans Benefits Awareness Program: Stan Baughn, Director Veterans Benefits Awareness

**Benefits Supermarkets** – Stan Baughn reported the September 11<sup>th</sup> Supermarket in Clinton had 237 veterans signed the attendance roster and of that number 211 signed up to see a Service Officer. A total of 6,682 veterans have registered at the 24 Supermarkets held.

He also reported the end of August a total of 6,582 calls have been made to the toll free number of these over 4,000 have been good calls.

Knight Ridder article published in July has generated two responses from other states inquiring about Veterans Benefits Supermarkets. Pennsylvania and North Carolina were both sent packets of information regarding supermarkets.

Upcoming Supermarkets: September 29<sup>th</sup> in Kansas City in conjunction with Missouri Career Center and October 2<sup>nd</sup> at Lake St. Louis.

Supermarkets for 2005 are being scheduled.

Outreach: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

Ron Taylor advised the Commissioners that Pat Kerr has been busy with outreach efforts. Staff has been attending the Freedom Salute Ceremonies hosted by the Missouri National Guard trying to reach the returning home veterans. These ceremonies have been taking place 60-90 days from the day the soldier returns to the states.

Mr. Taylor attended a meeting at the VA Medical Center. The Director of the Network was there with some statistics that points out how our world has changed over the last few years. In the mid 90's the VA, the Commission and the active duty military worked jointly in an out-processing system with soldiers soon to be discharged, however prior to that time the WWII, Korean and Vietnam soldiers where not given information on benefits so MVC targeted these veterans in raising awareness to those that got missed. Since September, 2001 over 200,000 soldiers have been separated from active duty, 73% of these soldiers are Guard members and Reserves. These do not get the opportunity for counseling and assistance that military active duty members get. VA statistics shows 27% of these soldiers since 2001 are actually receiving treatment at VA Medical Centers, 20% are being treated for psychological issues including PTSD. Also many soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq have infections and problems which are unique to that environment. Less than 13% of the guard members and

reserves are accessing VA services. Ms. Kerr is working to reach this group. MVC will be talking to the Joint Interim Committee in order to try and determine an effective method to provide information to the Reservists so that we can get them into the VA system.

Stan Baughn will meet next week with the Guard and the Family Assistance Coordinator to discuss VA benefits. Mr. Taylor stated MVC will continue to look for ways to access these people to raise benefits awareness.

Mr. Taylor reported the Joint Interim Committee has discussed creating a Military Relief Fund as a check off on Missouri tax return to assist families of deployed soldiers with expenses.

Commissioner West noted all Guard members, Reservist and active duty returning from Afghanistan or Iraq on active duty are receiving physicals to make sure that they are not bringing anything back into the states should be given the benefits information at that time. He stated this needs to be followed up with the military staff performing the out processing.

### **III. NEW BUSINESS:**

Jack Matthews, President MVC Foundation, Inc. and prior Commissioner introduced members of the Bloomfield Cemetery Assistance League and explained how the Assistance League works very diligently for the cemetery.

Jerry Elder, Stoddard County Veteran, informed the Commissioners the 16 member honors guard from Stoddard County has performed 95 funerals to date in that surrounding area. He also thanked Ken Swearengen and his staff in Bloomfield for their great support.

Robert (Wendy) Richmond, President Bloomfield Assistance League complemented Ken and staff at the Bloomfield Veterans Cemetery.

Jim Whitfield, Secretary MVC Foundation, Inc., Western Area Coordinator MO Military Funeral Honors and prior Commissioner, reported July 1, 1999 was the first day of operation for the Funeral Honors program and through the many volunteers they have coordinated over 36,800 honors for veterans. These services are coordinated through the Funeral Directors across the state. The MO Military Funeral Honors appreciates all the assistance they receive. Mr. Whitfield noted his disappointment that not all service organizations were represented at the Clinton Veterans Benefits Supermarket and would recommend if they are receiving state VSO grant money they should be required to attend these events. Mr. Whitfield informed everyone that November 2 marks the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Commission and he briefly discussed the history of the Commission.

Ron Taylor advised the Ft. Leonard Wood Cemetery project has a slight delay. The next study required will be done by the Corps of Engineers who has agreed to do it but until there is a continuing resolution for next years budget there will not been a signed contract.

Nancy Arnold, Director Poplar Bluff VA Medical Center, commented on the raising awareness of the returning guard members. Poplar Bluff VAMC has been contacting all units in the area and finding out their return so that they can send a Public Relations staff and Eligibility staff member out to them to discuss VA benefits and raise the awareness. She also informed that the past couple years the VAMC has been accessing care through the Tele Health initiatives. The Tele Health program allows veterans to go to West Plains or Cape Girardeau and get their specialty care. The quality care outcome for this program in the past year has been a success with the smoking sensation and diabetic care.

John Eckhoff, St. Louis County Human Services urged everyone to attend the Lake St. Louis Supermarket and asked that Ron Taylor to contact the Governor and Lt. Governor's office for attendance. Mr. Eckhoff expressed his interest to the Commissioners the possibility of going to the next level with the Supermarkets. He passed around to the Commissioners a model book of the Homeless Veterans Burial Program. He stated this model could be distributed out to the communities with interest in Supermarkets and they could organize committees and host events with little assistance from the Commission. Mr. Eckhoff informed the Commission that many of the soldiers returning home are not aware of the benefits available to them and he feels if we can get the local Legions and VFW post in our communities available to pass out information to returning soldiers would be helpful.

Commissioner Ross expressed his ongoing outrage and disgust with Jackson County Field on Honor Swan Lake Memorial Gardens. He received a full page ad in the paper advertising false information regarding Swan Lake Memorial Gardens. He is currently working with a veteran that has requested a refund and will advise the Commission of the outcome. Ron Taylor advised that he has been in contact with the VA regarding this issue. He also stated that he believes Swan Lake has backed off on some of the advertising wording. Mr. Taylor stated he would like to receive some case history information sent in from veterans that MVC could forward to the Attorney Generals Office.

Hal Dulle, Deputy Director reported on a recent state Directors conference he attended in Albany, NY. Issues discussed at the conference included the deficiencies encountered with the returning home Guard and Reservists. Mr. Dulle stated MVC will be working with the Kansas Director of Veterans Affairs regarding Fort Riley in making sure these soldiers returning there get benefits information. He informed the commissioners that Joey Strickland, Director Louisiana Veterans Affairs appointed two committees one on minority veterans and the other on female veterans. MVC will be participating on both of these

committees. Mr. Dulle stated that nationally information will be collected from other states regarding the minority veterans, female veterans and the transition of Guardsmen and Reservists back into the states. General Les Beavers, Director Kentucky Veterans Affairs will be sharing this information with all states.

Ron Taylor advised the Commissioners the 1<sup>st</sup> rough draft of the annual report was distributed for their review and if they have suggestions or comments to forward them to Jill Talken within the two weeks. Julie Miler will be working on the budget info and Mr. Taylor will be updating the letter in the annual report.

Commissioner Niewoehner informed everyone that the VVA currently has a Homeless Program in place for veteran burials and was concerned that the Homeless Veterans Burial Program model book distributed by John Eckhoff does not include them. He expressed his concerns with the Veterans History Project and noted this is not required by state statute and the Commission should have the final vote on whatever is brought up. Commissioner Niewoehner stated he is receiving negative feedback from veterans concerning spending 1 million dollars on videos. Mr. Taylor noted that there is a bill that sets up the Educational Historical Trust Fund which requires if money goes into fund would be used for history project and would allow for contributions.

Jim Whitfield noted the Honors Program does not cost the taxpayers any money. The National Guard Trust Fund supports the continuation of the program along with the service organizations and federal funding. The money assists with expenses and uniforms.

Bill Matthews, American Legion thanked the Commissioners for conducting the meeting at Bloomfield and invited all to visit the Stars & Stripes Museum.

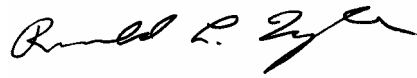
The Commission closed the meeting to conduct an executive session for the purpose to discuss legal issues held pursuant to Section 610.021, Subsection (3) RSMo.

The meeting was reopened.

### **NEXT MEETING**

Chairman Fairfax announced at the request of the Assistant Director for the VA Regional Office in St. Louis the next Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, November 4, 2004 at 9:00 a.m. at the VA Regional Office, 400 South 18<sup>th</sup> Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald L. Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a stylized "T".

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Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary